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AUTHOR Mueller, Josef
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ABSTRACT

Despite renewed attention to global poverty alleviation and sustainable development, most agencies and organizations donating large amounts of funds for the social sector have been decreasing their aid to literacy and nonformal (basic) education. In most cases, donors trying to combine support for basic education with poverty alleviation focus on primary education or recently developed alternative patterns for providing primary education to school dropouts or unschooled youths. Among the reasons for declining donor support of literacy and nonformal (basic) education are the following: the overwhelming magnitude of the problem; the nonformal sector's relative lack of equipment and organization; the physical invisibility of success; the view that literacy is a sensitive area for involvement by oversees governments; lack of methods to evaluate nonformal literacy programs' results accurately; the belief of many donors that literacy is a "murky area" best left to nongovernmental organizations; and lack of resources to mount national literacy and nonformal education campaigns. (The bibliography contains 30 references. Appended are graphs/tables detailing the following: number of illiterate people in 1980-2010; number of illiterate people by sex; German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development aid to education in 1993-1995; and characteristics of education aid among selected donors.) (MN)

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ABBREVIATIONS

EFA	Education for All
GTZ	German Agency for Technical Co-operation
ICED	International Council for educational Development
IIEP	International Institute of Educational Planning (UNESCO)
IWGE	International Working Group on Education (UNESCO/IIEP)
JICA	Japanese International Co-operation Agency
LNFE	Literacy and Non-Formal Education
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NFET	Non-Formal Education and Training (WB)
NGOs	non-governmental organisations
ODA	Overseas Development Administration (UK)
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
UNCHS	United Nations Centre for Human Settlements
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WCEF	World Conference on Education for All.

LITERACY AND NON-FORMAL (BASIC) EDUCATION - STILL A DONOR PRIORITY?
The Donors Concern with Literacy and Non-Formal Education

Introduction

As part of the renewed attention to global poverty alleviation and sustainable development, most donors give great importance to support for the social sector. One could therefore expect an increase in aid to education. This, however, is not the case. Though many donors pay increased attention to basic education, the International Working Group on Education (IWGE) observed recently that

> *education aid has declined among a great number of donors, and redirections of allocations to basic education have to be understood in the context of overall declining levels of education assistance.*[1]

And those agencies which try to combine support for Basic Education with poverty alleviation focus in most cases on primary education or the recently developed alternative patterns for providing primary education to school drop-outs or unschooled youths to the neglect of non-formal basic out-of-school education for adults.

1. The donors' difficulties with literacy and non-formal basic education

Literacy and non-formal education (LNFE) is a rather "murky area" for donors (Kenneth King 1991)[2] for a number of reasons:

- There is the sheer scale of the problem: 872 million illiterates in developing countries or 25% of all adults. 140 million children out-of-school. 52.5 % of these illiterates live in China and India. Illiteracy in low-income countries is still 51% (see App.1 and App.2). As donors try to target and projectise their aid, they fear that they can make little difference to a problem of this dimension They regard their efforts as a drop in the bucket, and illiteracy as a bottomless pit.
- Institutions and programmes in the non-formal sector are less equipped and organised, and the degree of institutionalisation in the system as a whole is often very small.
- There is the physical invisibility of success. There may be people made literate but in most cases there are no special buildings, no bricks and mortar to show the results of, for example, financial co-operation. The success is "physically invisible" (King 1991).
- Literacy is regarded as a sensitive area which German, British, and Japanese aid (for example) have tackled with restraint or left to NGOs. In its *Guidelines for United Kingdom Aid to Education in Developing Countries*, the UK Overseas Development Administration warned: "*This is a sensitive area for overseas governments, impinging as it does on the cultural sphere, and special*

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[1] Lene Buchert, *Recent Trends in Education aid: Towards a Classification of Policies*, a report from IWGE (UNESCO, IIEP Paris 1995) p. 25

[2] Kenneth King, Adult literacy and nonformal education: still donor priorities? in: *Aid and Education in the Developing World* (Longman, Harlow 1991) p.148

circumspection will be called for in any involvement by outsiders. Whereas a single Ministry of Education has traditionally been solely responsible for all education activity, it will be necessary to have regard to the tensions implicit in the inevitable involvement of a range of Ministries and other interests in NFE"[3]. Especially when literacy programmes followed Freirean approaches, the issues of empowerment and the politicisation of the poor questioned necessarily the status quo and were handled with great reserve by outside donors.

- Literacy achievement is a crucial issue. International requirements for statistics and the diploma disease made qualifications, standardised tests, and examinations necessary. In consequence, literacy campaigns and especially large-scale programmes tried hard to develop and introduce tests. But adults were not so much interested in getting tested, as they knew that certificates from a literacy class are of limited value on the labour market. Many adults were shy to sit for a test like children in school. Others left the class when they felt they had learned enough for what they needed in daily life. Nevertheless, many researchers complained first that information on literacy achievement was lacking, and shortly after that literacy programmes do not make people literate. Especially World Bank complains of the lack of reliable information on the achievements of literacy programmes, but it has not done much to improve the situation. Most of the economists' work on rates of return has been deployed on primary education, but there is a dearth of research that could compare benefits of literacy with other forms of educational investment.
- Where there has been research, the research methods were sometimes worse than the literacy programmes. The Experimental World Literacy Programme in the early seventies made great efforts to evaluate its results. Evaluators had to measure rises in individual productivity as the result of literacy instruction. In other words, those who attended functional literacy classes had to produce (for example) more maize or cotton. The application of merely quantitative rationalistic methods of measurement led to negative results. There was a lot of counting but not much observation, not much description, not much qualitative or participatory research to find out how the literacy programme has changed the lives of the people and the communities. If researchers still continue to look mainly for economic rates of return in the informal sector or subsistence economy - where illiterates live - they are on the wrong track and they will come up with wrong results.
- As literacy for many donors is a "murky area", they tend to leave it to NGOs. But NGOs deal with small selective and intensive projects, although often applying excellent participatory methods leading to presentable results. But illiteracy is a mass problem: can it be solved by small selective approaches?
- Would national campaigns or programmes then be a solution? A campaign or a large-scale literacy programme is an organised series of activities which needs personal, material and financial resources. A national government will provide these resources only if universal adult literacy is *"indeed considered central to the achievement of overall national developmental goals".*[4] Where the political will prevailed - and it prevailed mainly to ensure a new and centralised political unity - literacy campaigns and programmes were successful (Nicaragua, Tanzania, China, Vietnam) and resources were made available by the countries and by some interested donors e.g. SIDA.

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[3] quoted by King 1991 p. 173

[4] H.S. Bhola, *Promise of Literacy* (Nomos Baden Baden 1983), p.222

2. The non-formal education fashion in the seventies and eighties

In the seventies and early eighties, non-formal education became fashionable as an alternative to the formal school system. Criticism of the imbalances and elitism of the formal system was in vogue. The studies by the International Council for Educational Development (ICED) had a major influence on donor policy.[5] Basic education was to meet the "minimum essential learning" needs of children youth and adults. This idea of meeting the minimum essential learning needs through formal and non-formal approaches extended dramatically, as Kenneth King writes:[6]

> *the horizons of many educators beyond the school, and in particular, for a brief period, afforded some significant policy attention to the neglected area of adult and community education.*

The World Bank

Since Robert MacNamara's famous Education Sector Paper of 1974 the World Bank favoured four major approaches to LNFE (or NFET: non-formal education and training in the terminology of the Bank):

1. Development of practical skills
2. Basic literacy
3. Preparation of income-generating activities
4. Low-cost alternatives to primary education.

The general judgement of Adriaan M. Verspoor, Chief of the Education and Employment Division in the World Bank's Population and Human Resources Department[7], on these four programmes is negative. In his opinion, "*the outcome of many of these projects has been disappointing*".[8]

Practical skills training comprised about 80% of all NFET programmes. The teaching of agricultural and family life skills was the predominant area of interest. The more successful of these programmes focused on a specific and well-defined need or provided training to special interest groups on request, and the implementation of these programmes was phased over a decade or more, allowing the responsible agencies to learn from experience.

The promotion of **literacy** was included in 49% of the NFET programmes. The allocation of funds for literacy in many of these projects, as Verspoor admits[9], was

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[5] Philip Coombs with Manzoor Ahmed, *Attacking Rural Poverty: How Nonformal Education Can Help* (New York 1974)
Manzoor Ahmed and Philipp Coombs (eds.), *Education for Rural Development. Case Studies for Planners* (New York 1975)
Philip Coombs, with Roy Prosser and Monzoor Ahmed, *New Paths to Learning for Rural Children and Youth* (New York 1983)

[6] King 1991 p.167

[7] Adriaan M. Verspoor, Twenty years of World Bank support for basic education: presentation and evaluation. *Prospects* Vol xxi, No 3, 1991 (UNESCO Paris) pp.313-329

[8] Verspoor 1991 p.320

[9] Verspoor 1991 p.325

negligible. Only those projects were successful which had strong government backing, considerable support for strengthening the national management and implementation capacity, and adequate assistance for materials production. Successful programmes in general combined literacy with income-generating components.

Income-generating projects provide access to training, and often to credit or development grants to help participants expand their productive activities while acquiring literacy, numeracy and entrepreneurial skills. The evidence that combining income-raising programmes with literacy affect both components positively is in Adrian Verspoor's opinion quite compelling.[10]

Finally, for the World Bank[11] **non-formal schemes parallel or alternative to formal education** became the response to the needs and aspirations of the vast majority of the poor living in the villages. Formal primary schools were regarded as only one part of the delivery system, and parallel programmes could go on in rural education centres. These centres could meet the need for low-cost, minimum mass education. In consequence the Bank supported, in addition to the famous rural education centres, post-primary skill centres, brigades, young farmers' clubs and other alternatives to primary education to reach the out-of-school with non-formal education. Unfortunately, these alternatives were often introduced without the assurance of country commitment and without securing the acceptance of the parents of the pupils or the adult learners. They were regarded as second-best solutions, attempts to satisfy the rural poor without providing proper certificates or following an acknowledged curriculum. The World Bank drew the consequences. In its 1980 'Education Sector Working Paper', basic education was much less addressed as an alternative to the primary school, and the 1988 'Policy Paper on Education in Sub-Saharan Africa' was exclusively concerned with the school-system and its reform. Nonformal education and especially literacy had disappeared, as there was no evidence of the achievements of literacy and non-formal education programmes.[12]

The non-formal fashion of the seventies and earlier eighties, equally, did not affect the lending of the World Bank. While lending for primary education increased considerably, lending for NFET accounted for a very small proportion of total education lending.[13]

Other major donors

UNICEF, the original sponsor of Coombs' work, continued to follow the Basic Services Strategy, a kind of intersectoral approach which combined services to meet the basic needs, especially of the rural poor, by providing not only knowledge and

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[10] Verspoor 1991 p.325. It is interesting that Verspoor despite his harsh general judgement gets increasingly positive when going into details of the different programme types.

[11] Education Sector Paper 1974

[12] This was Aklilu Habte's argument in a meeting in Bonn 1989.

[13]

	primary education as % of total lending for education	non-formal basic education as % of lending
1970-74	5%	-
1975-79	14%	-
1980-84	14%	1.3%
1985-90	23%	0.3%
total 1970-90	18%	0.5% (Verspoor 1991 p. 314)

skills but also technical assistance in fields such as maternal and child health, family planning, water supply, nutrition, appropriate simple technology. It was only in the late eighties that UNICEF's attention began to swing back to primary education in its preparatory work for the World Conference on Education for All.

Another interesting example is **USAID**. USAID had showed great interest in NFE programmes - not so much as a cheaper version of education for those unserved by the school but as a possibility of skill development and increasing productivity. In the late eighties, USAID returned vigorously to improving the formal schools.[14] The main reason was that in an overly casual approach, NFET components were tacked on to projects without providing sufficient project funding or without the assurance of country commitment. The additional components were not seldom marginal to an existing project and were usually eliminated or reduced during implementation.

Germany increased its disbursements to basic education between 1992 and 1994 sixfold (see App.3).[15] The new 'Sector Concept on the Promotion of Basic Education in Developing Countries' published in 1992 by the Federal Ministry of Economic Co-operation and Development adopted the Jomtien concept of basic education, and considered *"formal and non-formal basic education of equal value".*[16] The aim of non-formal basic education is to link the acquisition of the general basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic with the provision of practical basic knowledge and skills which can help in earning a living, and to deepen, widen and stabilise knowledge and skills acquired in follow-up programmes after the literacy stage.[17] In the Ministry's view, basic needs-oriented development programmes are often limited in effectiveness without an inbuilt non-formal basic education or literacy component[18]. The Sector Concept Paper, however, admits that institutions and programmes in the non-formal sector are less equipped and organised, and that the degree of institutionalisation in the system as a whole is very small[19]. This and the fact that national governments give less priority to literacy programmes are probably the main reasons why donors have difficulties with literacy. In consequence - despite the priority given to non-formal basic education - the **German Agency for Technical Co-operation (GTZ)** launched only a few attempts at literacy without major success. In 1995, only ten of the 84 basic education projects of German Technical Co-operation had a clear focus on non-formal education of adults and only five of these ten on literacy.

After all the criticism, the experience from the seventies and eighties shows that non-formal education contributed greatly to the development of the informal sector by establishing low-cost non-formal training patterns for small-scale enterprises and agricultural extension. NFET projects were small, selective and intensive. Their

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[14] *"A.I.D. will not support programmes which promise only marginal improvements or which contribute mainly to maintenance of a qualitatively inadequate, inefficient, or ineffective education system".* USAID Policy Paper: Basic Education and Technical Training (Washington 1982), quoted in King 1991 p.171.

[15] as mentioned in the paper of the EFA Forum Secretariat on 'Performance of Bilateral and Multilateral Agencies in Basic Education' (UNESCO 1996) p.3, though there is a recent swing back in German educational aid to vocational training and higher education in order to promote or at least preserve Germany as a place ("Standort") of science and economy.

[16] BMZ, Sector Concept, p. 14

[17] BMZ, Sector Concept pp. 9ff

[18] BMZ, Sector Concept p. 15

[19] BMZ, Sector Concept p.9

smallness was their advantage, but in numerical terms NFE was not an alternative to Primary Education nor to national literacy campaigns or programmes. It was, therefore, necessary to follow a complementary strategy to meet the basic learning needs of children, youths and adults by combining formal and non-formal approaches to secure the synergetic effects of both systems. This has been the UNESCO strategy since its Second Medium-Term Plan 1984 to 1989, in which UNESCO combined formal and non-formal basic education under the programmatic title 'Development and Renewal of Primary Education and Intensification of the Struggle against Illiteracy'. This concept gained acceptance in the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien 1990.

3. The World Conference on Education for All

The conference in which UNESCO, UNICEF, WORLD BANK and UNDP joined together, took up the idea of basic learning needs:

> *These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning.*[20]

In the opinion of the Conference, *"an 'expanded vision' of basic education is needed that surpasses present resource levels, institutional structures, curricula, and conventional delivery systems while building on the best in current practices".*[21] In order to reduce, as the Conference stated in its Framework for Action,[22] the adult literacy rate to one half of its 1990 level by the year 2000 with significant emphasis on female literacy, it is not possible to concentrate on Primary Education alone, although Primary Education remained, in the words of the Conference, the first channel. Primary Education has to be supplemented by NFE as the second channel and by the media as the third channel. However, NFE should not again become the cheaper second-rate alternative, as *"Second-class or dead-end programmes cannot satisfy the need for equal learning opportunities and achievement; they simply substitute a new inequity for an old one".*[23]

Literacy in the view of the Conference is

> *"a life skill and the primary learning tool for personal and community development and self-sufficiency in a rapidly changing and increasingly interdependent world...It is the primary enabling force for all further education. It is a uniquely effective tool for learning, for accessing and*

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[20] World Conference on Education for All, 5-9 March 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand, World Declaration on Education for All, Article 1: Meeting Basic Learning Needs

[21] WCEFA, Article 2: Shaping the Vision

[22] WCEFA, Framework for Action, Goals and Targets: § 8

[23] WCEFA, Background Document p.58ff.

processing information, for creating new knowledge, and for participation in one's own culture and the emerging world culture".[24]

Despite its emphasis on the diversity of delivery systems or channels, and the adoption of UNESCO's 'two-pronged strategy' which combines primary education with non-formal literacy strategies, the Jomtien Conference was no turning point for literacy work. Of the 48 Round Tables, only three dealt with literacy, as Kenneth King counted. The weightiest papers dealt with Primary Education.[25]

The Jomtien Framework for Action invited countries to set their own targets for the 1990s. Number 4 of the EFA target dimensions calls for: "*Reduction of the illiteracy rate, to, say, one-half of its 1990 level by the year 2000, with sufficient emphasis on female literacy to significantly reduce the current disparity between male and female illiteracy rates*". And Number 5 advocates the *"expansion of provision of basic education and training in other essential skills required by youth and adults, with programme effectiveness assessed in terms of behavioural changes and impacts on health, employment and productivity".*[26] However, while Number 2 of the six target dimensions underlines explicitly "***universal** access"* to primary education, all the other items relating to early childhood education, adult literacy and other essential skills merely use words like "*expansion"* or *"reduction"*. Kenneth King in his Editorial to Number 19 of *NORRAG NEWS*[27] points out that "*only school education merited the idea of Education for All. In a real and literal sense, therefore, EFA at Jomtien was only about Schooling for All (SFA), and not about skills for all or literacy for all".* It is a generally accepted fact that, despite UNESCO's efforts, non-formal basic education and especially literacy, both at Jomtien and more so after Jomtien, played the role of the poor relative of primary schooling.

Barber Conable, President of the World Bank, made quite clear that support for basic primary education will be the Bank's dominant priority; and James Grant, Executive Director of UNICEF, underlined that *"Success in primary education can be the cutting edge for opening the way for success in broader and more complex education efforts including other elements of basic education".* In the most recent World Bank Study on 'Priorities and Strategies for Education', the World Bank understands by Basic Education primary and lower secondary formal education only.[28]

4. The Post-Jomtien Discussion (see App.4)

The World Bank

After Jomtien, primary and lower secondary formal education have thus become increasingly important for the Bank. In 1990-94, these levels represented half of all Bank lending for education; and *"basic (= primary) education will continue to receive the highest priority in the Bank's education lending to countries that have not yet achieved universal literacy and adequate access, equity, and quality at that*

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[24] WCEFA, Background Document p.63

[25] e.g.Marlaine Lockheed and Adrian Verspoor, 'Improving PE in developing countries: a review of policy options'; Keith Lewin and Chris Colclough, 'Educating all Children'; Dieter Berstecher and Roy Carr-Hill, 'PE and economic recession in the developing world since 1980'.

[26] Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs, Jomtien 1990, paragraph 8

[27] K. King, The EFA discourse from 1990 to 1996, *NORRAG NEWS*, Edinburgh, June 1996, p.2

[28] World Bank, Priorities and Strategies for Education (Washington 1995) p. XI, p.10, pp. 104-106

level".[29] Though the new study under the key word 'Equity' defines basic education as *"the basic knowledge and skills necessary to function effectively in society"*, it does not give major attention to non-formal basic education.[30] The World Bank is of the opinion that the emphasis on formal basic education (only) is *"in harmony with the recommendations of the World Conference on Education for All"*. However, even the World Bank admits that *"the combination of an increasing absolute number of children out of school and low primary completion rates means that the formal education system in the poorest countries is likely to continue to be inadequate as a mechanism for overcoming illiteracy".*[31] Under the influence of NGOs such as Action Aid, the World Bank seems to be reassessing its outlook to non-formal basic education and literacy. The argument is that while primary education in many countries is universal, de-schooling is increasing in the poorest countries. In conflict and post-conflict situations, whole generations have had no opportunity to attend school. It is necessary now to reach the unreached. To reach the unreached, new delivery mechanisms are needed. These could be literacy programmes provided that they

- are connected with the delivery of social or human services or have an initial objective other than literacy such as acquiring health information or self-help activities;
- distinguish between teenagers and older adults, as adults learn in different ways from adolescents; priority target groups could be older school drop-outs with some literacy skills;
- focus on female and not only on male themes, as most participants in literacy groups will continue to be women;
- use a participatory pedagogy sensitive to the local environment, so that literacy becomes a more elaborate way of representing local knowledge, and literacy is linked much more tightly to other aspects of development in the local area. The functional approach is a necessity;
- are carefully monitored.[32]

The World Bank plans to review in a future paper recent promising approaches which are nearly all selective, intensive and small scale.

Other Major Donors

UNESCO was more or less the only major sponsor of the Conference who saw the necessity for the extension and renewal of Primary Education along with a focus on out-of-school literacy work. It advocated this *"Two-Pronged Strategy"* in its Third Medium-Term Plan 1990 to 1995 and in its Ten-Year Programme to eliminate illiteracy.[33] In UNESCO's new workplan for 1996 and its 1997 Major Programme I *Towards Lifelong Education for ALL*, basic education (understood as both primary and non-formal basic education) has top priority.[34] It lays emphasis on activities aimed at alleviating poverty and giving particular attention to the education of girls and women and disadvantaged and marginalized youth, as well as to the needs of the least-developed countries, in particular those in Africa, and the countries in transition or in post-conflict situations. For UNESCO, basic education still encompasses early

[29] World Bank 1995 p.14
[30] World Bank 1995 p.10
[31] World Bank 1995 p. 41
[32] World Bank 1995 p. 90
[33] UNESCO 25 C/71 Plan of Action to eradicate Illiteracy by the Year 2000.
[34] UNESCO, 28 C/5 Draft Programme and Budget for 1996-1997

childhood education and primary education as well as literacy and life-skills training for youth and adults.

Under the Major Programme *Towards Lifelong Education for All*, the first programme *Basic Education for All* focuses attention on

> *"expanding and improving internal efficiency of existing systems of education, including literacy and adult education programmes. In addition, a special emphasis is placed on developing low-cost and flexible delivery systems - both formal and non-formal - adapted to the particular needs and circumstances of different categories of learner groups unreached or underserved by existing systems. These include, in particular, girls and women, especially in rural areas, and the various disadvantaged groups e.g. school drop-outs and unemployed youth, street and working children, and minority groups and populations living in remote areas".*[35]

The second Programme *Improving the Quality and Relevance of Basic Education* focuses on developing learner-centred curricula, geared to key learning competencies in the domains of literacy, numeracy, productive and life-skills, as well as moral and cultural values, giving due attention to the gender issues. UNESCO will give technical assistance to assess and improve the impact and cost-effectiveness of various non-formal education, training, and literacy programmes for youth and adult men and women. UNESCO hopes to provide through these activities the necessary information to renew the interest of major donors in non-formal basic education.

According to a survey conducted by UNESCO in 1995,[36] there has been since Jomtien an overall increase in financial commitments and disbursements to basic education by many donors including Finland, the Netherlands and especially Germany[37]. While primary education remains the major component receiving donor support, and external funding tends to be used for teacher training, curriculum development, production of educational materials, and construction and repair of school buildings, a number of donors like Australia, Netherlands, UK, Portugal, Sweden, Canada, Japan, Switzerland, Italy and the USA still - or again - support literacy programmes and adult education.[38]

However, not all developing countries give priority to basic education and especially literacy when negotiating external assistance. This becomes obvious when reading the reports on the Regional Policy Review Seminars which prepared the Mid-Decade Review Meeting of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All, 16-19 June 1996 in Amman, Jordan. Literacy often is mentioned only incidentally in the form of a few paragraphs in a chapter. The problem that besets programmes in most Asian countries for example is the failure of literacy to offer the 'pay off' that learners expect. That 'pay off' needs not be exclusively in economic terms. Literacy is sought for

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[35] UNESCO 28C/5, No. 01102

[36] See 'Education for All: Achieving the Goal', Working Document for the Mid-Decade Meeting of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All, 16 to 19 June 1996 in Amman, Jordan, (UNESCO Paris 1996) pp. 17ff

[37] Detailed figures on German aid in appendix 3

[38] More details in the preparatory paper of the EFA Forum Secretariat for the EFA Mid-Decade Review on the Performance of Bilateral and Multilateral Agencies in Basic Education.

family, social, cultural and religious motives as well as economic ones. Literacy is useful only to the extent that it permits one to read, to learn and, ultimately, to live better. According to UNESCO, *" the country reviews hint at the need to give 'greater relevance' to literacy activities and deplore the high rates of drop-out and relapse into illiteracy that are common problems, but they fail to get to the root of such failures or to suggest how these difficulties might be overcome or reduced".*[39]

Donors, therefore, still have their worries and concerns. In view of the lack of carefully elaborated project proposals, they question the commitment of governments to pursue EFA politics. Donors even note the reluctance of some governments to permit external involvement in an area that touches the soul of the nation, the education of its future citizens. The Japanese International Co-operation Agency (JICA) for example is still of the opinion that it should not become involved in basic education, and that basic education is not well suited to aid programmes, because basic education involves people's morals, values, and customs.[40] Without doubt, donors have to balance their own priorities and advocacy in favour of basic education against the needs expressed by their partner countries. And they must continue to work towards co-ordinating and harmonising their activities at all levels. What is needed are sector studies, commissioned by all the donors interested in the promotion of basic education in a specific country and elaborated in close co-operation with national authorities and NGOs working in the field. In any case, the expanded vision of basic education according to the EFA Forum Secretariat needs to be applied more rigorously in both policy and practice: *"this entails moving beyond the focus on primary schooling to give more attention to out-of-school education and to provide learning opportunities for all age-groups".*[41]

5. Trends and tendencies in the present discussion on non-formal basic education and literacy

The recent series of UN Conferences[42] underlined the pivotal role of education as a key to sustainable development. According to the EFA Forum Secretariat, these

> *"conferences have furthered understanding of the interplay between environmental protection, economic growth, social integration, women's empowerment and demographic factors in development. They also reiterated the necessary links between development, human rights and the practice of democracy, all vital to the safeguarding of peace. Education's pivotal role in all these domains was strongly reaffirmed by the conferences. This has*

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[39] International Consultative Forum on EFA, Issues Paper for Discussion prepared for the Policy Review Seminar for East and Southeast Asia & the Pacific (Paris, November 1995) pp. 15ff. The judgement made regarding country papers from the Asian region holds true for other regions as well. Cf the papers on the South Asia Sub-Region, West and Central Africa, and the Caribbean (UNESCO Paris 1995/96)

[40] Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA), Study on development assistance for development and education (Tokyo 1994), quoted in *NORRAG NEWS* 19, p. 29

[41] Education for All: Achieving the Goal, Working Document for Amman p. 40

[42] World Summit for Children (New York 1990), Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro 1992), World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna 1993), International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo 1994), World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995), Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995)

contributed to a global consensus that Education for All is an essential key to the development of society".[43]

Literacy work has to be seen in the context of sustainable development. It is not an end in itself. It is a way of remembering, recording, representing reality and communicating across space and time.[44] It is a tool of learning and communication and therefore context-bound. This context is first and foremost the context of poverty. And since poverty as a mass problem will be with us for a long time, illiteracy as another mass problem will be with us for a long time as well. It is an illusion that illiteracy could be overcome or 'eradicated' within the next ten or twenty years. According to the most recent UNESCO statistics,[45] the total number of illiterates will only go down from 885 million in 1995 to 856m in 2010. In Sub-Saharan Africa, it will even go up from 141 to 147 million, and according to other UNESCO estimates, the number will come close to 200 million.

The time of the mass campaigns seems to be over. Though the present Total Literacy Mission in India shows typical characteristics of a mass campaign and there have been recent campaigns in non-socialist countries such as the 'Campaign Msg. Leonidas Proaño' from May to September 1989 (five months only!) in Ecuador, campaigns were a peculiarity of socialist countries and were justified in terms of mass mobilisation. With the break-down of the Eastern block and the rise of multi-party governments, the idea of campaigns has faded away. Campaigns can be useful for information purposes, creation of public awareness and **motivation** for literacy, but the characteristics of centralisation and the top-down approach which are part and parcel of campaigns jeopardise very important essentials of adult education, namely needs orientation, participation and self-determination.[46]

But even the large-scale national literacy programmes got into nearly insurmountable difficulties when going from the pilot phase to the national stage with regard to functionality and needs orientation, training of literacy personnel, production of materials, or transport. After some time, the original enthusiasm and energy faded away and the programmes began to drag, the business of civil servants on the one side and of poorly trained and often unpaid voluntary literacy tutors on the other. The enormous task of planning and implementing large-scale programmes and the resources needed over a reasonable period of time were grossly underestimated, especially by the poorer countries.[47] This does not mean that national or large scale programmes are not feasible, but without major donor assistance they demand too much from poorer countries.

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[43] Working Document for Amman, p. 15

[44] David Archer and Sara Cottingham, *The Reflect Mother Manual*, Action Aid (London 1996) p. 9

[45] Compendium of statistics on literacy, 1995 edition (UNESCO 1995). See appendices 1 and 2 of this paper.

[46] Heribert Hinzen, Jakob Horn, Wolfgang Leumer, Cooperating or Campaigning for Literacy, in *Adult Education and Development*, 43 (Bonn 1995) p. 388

[47] A detailed picture of what is needed for large-scale literacy programmes or campaigns is given by H.S. Bhola in his *Memory to Decision Makers in The Promise of Literacy* (Nomos Baden Baden 1983) pp. 220-244 .

Given the constraints of large-scale literacy programmes, development workers are now more concerned with local initiatives than with the transformation of whole societies.

These initiatives nowadays take into account various general principles, such as that:

- Literacy is an important tool of communication which makes a person independent from personal contact. Literacy as such (i.e. reading, writing, and arithmetic) can be meaningful and functional in a context where literacy as such is needed, for example, in urban areas, and where written materials are within reach.
- Literacy is only one phase in a process of "learning throughout life",[48] but it is not necessarily the first phase or the first step in a development process focusing on poverty alleviation. Literacy is "potential added" (Bhola 1983), and can come at a later date when people are prepared for literacy. Literacy can "come second", and in many cases it comes second when learners are aware or can be made aware of the need of literacy. Especially in self-help activities, the skills needed for the self-help and/or income-generating activities will assume much greater importance in the minds of the learners than literacy.[49]
- Literacy has to support other aspects of development. Literacy is certainly only a part, but it is an essential part, of basic services. While it is useless to offer literacy instead of food, housing, clean water, electricity or jobs, it may become uneconomic to offer them without literacy.[50] Though illiteracy will be with us for quite some time, illiteracy has no future. It is, therefore, an indicator of short-sighted planning to offer these basic services without a strong literacy component.
- Literacy programmes are based on participation. As Nyerere repeated frequently, people cannot be developed, they develop themselves. Learners and together with their learners field workers and all the agencies involved must have a say in decision-making at their respective levels. A recent study by UNCHS[51] points out that community participation can mean at least three different things:
  - **contributing** where money, labour, or materials are provided;
  - **consulting** where views are sought in order to elicit contributions, but the decisions may be made elsewhere;
  - **controlling** where community members are really performing community-management functions.
- Literacy means literacies in context, in the learners' context. Who needs literacy and what for? The later UNESCO definition of 1978[52] of literacy takes this into account when defining a **functionally** illiterate person as someone *"who cannot engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his [sic] group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading and writing, and calculation for his own and the community's development"*. As

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[48] *Learning, the Treasure within*, the new Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, edited by Jacques Delors (UNESCO 1996), uses this terminology

[49] Cf. The "Literacy Comes Second Approach" described by Alan Rogers in *Women Literacy Income Generation*, Education for Development (Reading 1994) esp. pp. 73-77

[50] Paul Fordham, Deryn Holland, Juliet Millican, *Adult Literacy: a Handbook for Development Workers*, Oxfam/VSO (Oxford 1995) p.6

[51] John Fox, 'Rhetoric and Reality: A Commentary on the UNCHS Community Development Programmes in Ghana, Uganda and Zambia' (Nairobi 1993), here quoted from Paul Fordhamet al 1995 p.7

[52] UNESCO General Conference 1978

functionality of literacy depends on the context, it has to be re-defined for every time and in every place. Making literacy functional implies placing people at the centre of their environment and giving them the means to take an active part in community life.

- Centralised top-down approaches cannot put learners at the centre. Bottom-up approaches only can secure context-bound functionality and flexibility. NGOs, therefore, are often in a better position to cope with literacy programmes which go across sectors and are based on participation.
- The language of instruction in many cases is a serious problem. It is generally accepted that from an educational point of view, the mother tongue is best suited as the language of instruction at the literacy level. However, in many cases mother tongue is not 'functional' as it would confine the learners to a very limited environment, and instruction in the mother tongue is not feasible or extremely difficult if the language is not written. Learners often are interested in learning the national or even an international language like English to secure mobility and paid employment.
- Literacy implies a process of conscientisation and empowerment combined with the delivery of practical knowledge and skill-training. This holds especially true for programmes for girls and women. For them, literacy programmes often are the only possibility of them getting any systematically organised form of education and of becoming aware of their strengths and possibilities. Many literacy programmes, therefore, turn out to be women's programmes even if they were not planned as such. But unfortunately, they often do not take into account the women's needs and their position in society and economy.
- Learners do not think about their own development in sectors and subsectors. Literacy programmes, therefore, go across sectors such as rural development, community development, health, nutrition. Literacy programmes imply an intersectoral approach. This is one of the major difficulties of large-scale programmes which are often the responsibility of only one Government Ministry or organisation.
- Learners are of different ages and in consequence have diverging life experience. Learners can learn from each other. Even if 'Family Literacy' is more suitable for industrialised countries, literacy programmes do well in using an intergenerational approach. It is obvious that the literacy of parents and especially mothers has consequences for the education of their children.[53]
- Literacy is not acquired once and forever. Literates fall back into illiteracy if they cannot apply, deepen, and widen their literacy skills. Literacy work is meaningless in a non-literate environment but a literate environment cannot come about without literates. There is a circle between literacy and what we call a literate environment, and no handy solution is available to break this circle especially in the poorer countries.[54]

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[53] The Final Communiqué of the Mid-Decade Meeting of the International Consultative Forum on Education for All (UNESCO 1996) p.2 underlines this intergenerational approach when summarising: *"In all societies, the best predictor of the learning achievement of children is the education and literacy level of their parents. Investments in adult education and literacy are, thus, investments in the education of entire families".*

[54] For possibilities to overcome the dilemma, see the recent study by Edwin Townsend-Coles for SIDA *After Literacy, What?* (Oxford 1994) and Alan Rogers, *Using Literacy: a new approach to post-literacy materials*, ODA, Occasional Paper No. 10 (London 1994)

Literacy workers have seen many approaches which in their time were 'brand-new', and it was necessary to jump on the band-wagon in order to be up-to-date. Some of them were just the same old guy but now in 'Lederhosen' to fit nicely into a rural environment or the same old girl in hot pants to fit into an urban context. However, one recent approach has increased the interest not only of the World Bank[55] but of many development workers, an exceptional event! It is the so-called REFLECT approach[56] which starts from rural and community development and combines participatory rural appraisal with literacy. The REFLECT approach replaces prefabricated primers by materials elaborated by the learners themselves. By the end of the REFLECT process, each circle of learners will have produced a small book with maps, matrices, calendars and diagrams that represent local reality, systematise the existing knowledge of the participants and promote a detailed analysis of local issues meaningful to the learners. This analysis then becomes the basis of local action and provides a strong link between the literacy programme and other development activities. The REFLECT approach does not make other approaches redundant, but it is based on theory and practice and would seem to be most suitable for some of the small and intensive literacy projects in which lies the future of literacy work, if we take into account that large-scale centralised approaches to literacy are less suitable for adult learners and beyond the resources of the poorest countries.

Conclusion

Illiteracy has no future but it will - like poverty - be a feature in most developing countries for the foreseeable future. The struggle for literacy is seen by many as a struggle against poverty, and as such simultaneously for social and economic development, justice, equality, respect for traditional cultures and recognition of the dignity of every human being

Nevertheless, adult learning opportunities (including literacy) are expanding, most of the time, in a diffused and disconnected way, even outside the recognised adult education domain, in the form of integrated components of health, agriculture, self-help, small-scale industry and environmental interventions. The statement of the Declaration of 'The Right to Learn' adopted 1985 by the Fourth International Conference on Adult Education still holds true: *"The right to learn is the right to read and write"*.

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[55] World Bank,Priorities and Strategies for Education (Washington 1995) p. 90

[56] The REFLECT approach (Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques) is described in a number of studies e.g.

- David Archer, The changing roles of non-governmental organisations in the field of education, in: *International Journal of Educational Development*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 223-232 (Pergamon 1994)
- David Archer and Sara Cottingham, Worldwide Launch of Reflect, in: *Education Action* No 6, Action Aid, London 1996
- David Archer and Sara Cottingham, *The Reflect Mother Manual*, Action Aid, March 1996

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International Consultative Forum on Education for All: Mid-Decade Meeting of the 16 to 19 June 1996 in Amman, Jordan, Working Document 'Education for All: Achieving the Goal' (UNESCO Paris 1996)

International Consultative Forum on Education for All: Preparatory Paper for the Amman Meeting, 'Performance of Bilateral and Multilateral Agencies in Basic Education' (UNESCO 1996)

International Consultative Forum on Education for All: Reports on the Regional Policy Review Seminars (Mid-Decade Review of Progress towards Education for All) for East and Southeast Asia and the Pacific, South Asia, West and Central Africa, Caribbean (UNESCO 1995/96)

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Rogers, Alan: *Using Literacy, a new approach to post-literacy materials,* Overseas Develoment Administration Research Paper No 10 (London 1994)

Townsend-Coles, Edwin: *After Literacy, What?* study prepared for SIDA (Oxford 1994)

UNESCO: *Compendium of Statistics on Literacy* (UNESCO Paris 1995)

UNESCO: Draft Programme and Budget for 1996-1997 (28 C/5)

UNESCO: Plan of Action to Eradicate Illiteracy by the Year 2000 (25 C/71)

US AID: Policy Paper on Basic Education and Technical Training (Washington 1982)

Verspoor, Adriaan M.: Twenty Years of World Bank Support for Basic Education. Presentation and Evaluation, in: *Prospects* Vol. XXI, No 3, 1991 (UNESCO Paris)

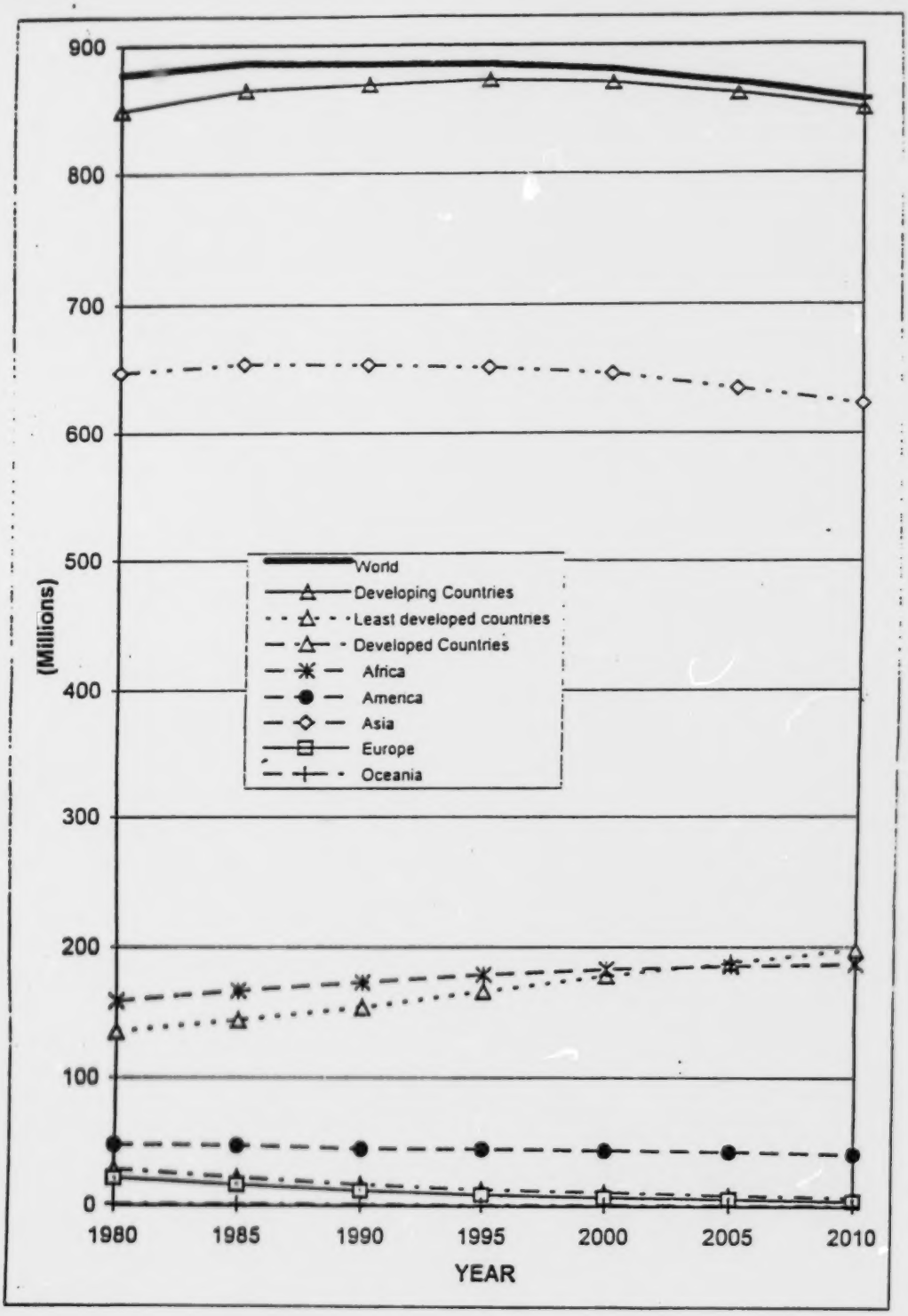
World Bank: Education Sector Paper (Washington 1974)

World Bank: Priorities and Strategies for Education (Washington 1995)

World Conference on Education for All, 5-9 March 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand. World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO 1990)

Appendix 1

NUMBER OF ADULT ILLITERATES 1980-2010



Source : Compendium of statistics on literacy - 1995 edition, UNESCO 1995

Appendix 2

Table 3: Estimated number of adult illiterates aged 15+ by sex and by region 1980-2010

(in millions)

	BOTH SEXES					MALE					FEMALE				
	1980	1990	1995	2000	2010	1980	1990	1995	2000	2010	1980	1990	1995	2000	2010
World	**877**	**885**	**885**	**881**	**856**	**326**	**324**	**320**	**316**	**307**	**551**	**561**	**565**	**565**	**549**
Developing Countries	848	868	872	870	849	318	318	315	312	304	531	550	557	558	545
of which															
Sub-Saharan Africa	126	137	141	143	147	50	53	53	54	55	76	84	87	89	92
Arab States	56	63	65	68	70	21	24	24	25	25	34	39	41	43	45
Latin America/Caribbean	44	43	43	42	39	19	19	19	19	19	25	24	23	23	21
Eastern Asia/Oceania	276	231	210	182	126	90	70	60	50	32	186	161	149	132	94
Southern Asia	346	394	416	438	471	139	153	159	166	175	207	241	256	272	296
Least developed countries	136	154	166	178	198	55	61	65	70	77	81	93	101	109	122
Developed Countries	29	17	13	11	7	8	6	5	4	3	21	11	8	6	4
CLASSIFICATION BY CONTINENTS															
Africa	159	173	179	183	187	62	66	67	68	69	96	107	111	114	118
America	48	45	45	44	41	21	20	20	20	19	27	25	25	24	21
Asia	647	653	651	646	623	237	233	228	224	216	410	419	422	421	407
Europe	22	12	9	7	4	6	4	3	3	2	17	8	6	4	2
Oceania	1.3	1.2	1.1	1.0	0.9	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.6

Source:UNESCO, Division of Statistics, Statistics on Adult Literacy. Preliminary Results of the 1994 Estimations and Projections. October 1994, p.5

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Appendix 3

German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development

Aid to Education: Commitments from 1993 to 1995

	1993				1994				1995			
	TechnCoop in the strict sense (GTZ)	Techn.Coop. in the wider sense	Financial Cooperation	Together	Techn. Coop. in the strict sense (GTZ)	Techn. Coop. in the wider sense	Financial Coop.	total	Techni. Coop. in the strict sense (GTZ)	Techn. Coop. in the wider sense	Financial Cooperation	Total
basic education	50,3	181,9	20,0	252,2	41,5	204,0	106,0	351,5	49,7	182,5	287,0	519,2
higher education	30,0	63,4	22,3	115,7	36,9	101,0	0	137,9	26,8	58,2	5,0	90,0
vocational tr.	115,5	255,7	0	371,2	136,0	36,3	13,5	512,5	114,9	255,0	13,0	382,9
other	16,5	205,1	0	221,6	6,0	208,4	0	214,4	9,0	48,2	-	57,2
together	212,3	706,1	42,3	960,7	220,4	876,4	119,5	1.216,3	200,4	543,9	305,0	1.049,3

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Appendix 4

Appendix: Characteristics of education aid among selected donors

Donor Agencies	Development and education policy themes	Education priority areas	Geographical distribution	Modality/Principles	Prospects/Concerns
UNESCO	Education indispensable to wider diffusion of culture, justice, freedom, peace, human dignity. Education a tool and method of achieving world peace.	Literacy (children and adults). Basic education for all.	n/a	n/a	n/a
UNICEF	Help protect the lives of children and promote their development. Education for all.	Goal: universal primary education. Basic education: 10% of total expenditures 1990, 18% in 1995, 25 % in 2000. Textbook production. Action plans to promote basic education. Basic education for girls/women.	Developing countries all over the world.	Grants.	Committed to raising the proportion of educational expenditure to one quarter of total programme expenditure by 2000.
UNDP	Sustainable human development and capacity-building. Poverty eradication. Social integration. Equity. Empowerment of women. Adolescents and youth.	Basic education: 32%. Secondary & tertiary: 68%.	74% of core resources to countries with low Human Develop. Indicators (most to Africa, Asia and Pacific). Basic education funding: Asia and Pacific: 37%. Latin America /Caribbean: 40%. Arab States: 36%. Africa: 29%.	Grants. Technical co-operation. Programme support. Multi-sector support. Donor collaboration. Support governments and NGOs.	Increasingly more to basic education, but generally significant increases appear to be unlikely. Capacity-building role. Partnerships. Basic learning needs of adolescents and youth.

Source: Report from the International Working Group on Education (IWGE). UNESCO/IIEP 1995, pp. 47, 52, 53

Donor Agencies	Development and education policy themes	Education priority areas	Geographical distribution	Modality/Principles	Prospects/Concerns
WB	Poverty reduction. Economic growth. Both goals supported by investment in primary education.	Since 1989 30% of lending for primary education. Lending for basic education expanding.	1989-1994: Latin A (+ Caribbean and South Asia: 48%. Sub-Saharan Africa: 17%. South Asia: 22% East and Central Europe: 5%. Middle East, North Africa: 8%.	Loans. Encourage governments to set in place reforms and finance investments needed to enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, quality and equity of education systems. Educational finance and management (decentralisation, fiscal sustainability). Private sector involvement in secondary/higher education. Girls education. Equity in access for the poor and other disadvantaged groups.	Next three years double amount for Human Resources Development (loans to governments, community groups and NGOs). Broadbased sector development and policy reform. Structural adjustment to be accompanied by targeted poverty reduction (protection of primary education and other social services).
GTZ	Poverty alleviation. Investment in human resources. Basic education: - system-related consultancy; - advisory assistance; - capacity-building; - development and introduction of appropriate curricular elements; - development and introduction of teaching and learning materials; Higher/science education: - enhancement of performance capacity; - institution-building; - relevance and efficiency; - twinning institutions.	Vocational education/higher education. Since Jomtien basic education increased, vocational training stabilised, higher education decreased.	• 1993. Basic education: Africa: 46%, Asia: 24%, Latin America: 14%, supraregional: 16%. Higher education: Latin America: 28%, Africa: 24%, Asia: 22%, North Africa/Middle East: 17%, supraregional: 9%. • 1994. Vocational education: Asia: 41%, Africa: 32%, Latin America: 21%, Europe: 5%.	Grants. Advisory services. Experts. Training. Planning.	Expected extension of contributions to education and to basic education at the expense of higher education.

Appendix 4

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From time to time, papers are prepared during the course of projects on which Education for ***Development*** is engaged. Rather than wait the lengthy time which many academic journals now require before publication, it has been decided to issue these papers under the format of Occasional Papers. It is hoped that in this way, they will reach a wide audience.

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